

**PORTRAIT OF CARRIE'S MISERY LIVING IN POVERTY IN  
THEODORE DREISER'S NOVEL *SISTER CARRIE* (1900): A  
SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH**



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Submitted as a Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement  
For getting Bachelor Degree of Education  
In English Department**

**by**

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2010**

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### A. Background of the Study

*Sister Carrie*, written by Theodore Dreiser from 1899 to 1900 was published by Doubleday, page in 1900. The novel created a stir from the moments of its publication. The story of Dreiser's Carrie seems like of the melodramatic girl in sadness, especially when she realizes that sin may be only her option for survival. Carrie is the example of a man who lives in poverty.

A man who lives in poverty should work hard to survive, although sin must be done. For most Americans, the word poverty is an ability to provide a family with a nutritious food, clothing and reasonable shelter (Robinson : 1999). People who live in poverty generally describe it as a vicious circle, since they are confronted by a wide range of misfortunes which are interlinked and hard to overcome (Annan :1998). In fact at times it seems Carrie is not even aware that she is acting badly. Dreiser emphasizes that Carrie acts as she does simply because she wants to be comfortable. Perhaps even more scandalously, Dreiser's novel implies that most people, if faced with the same choices Carrie faces, would do exactly the same. *Sister Carrie* is made as a powerful account of a young working girl rise to success and her slow decline. She is eighteen year of age bringing timid and full of the illusions of ignorance and youth. Whatever thus, she always struggles and never gives up changing her life better.

A young woman takes the train to Chicago in search of work in 1889 thus setting in motion a chain of events that will lead her to fame and fortune in New York glittering theater of world. While the plot of *Sister Carrie* may sound like a fairy tale, Theodore Dreiser was actually trying to write a work of literary realism. He filled the pages of the novel, first published in 1900, with the harsh details of everyday life, and generates controversy for the veiled but potent depiction of Carrie's sexual experiences with the dapper traveling salesman and the respectable salon manager, who both try to seduce her. According to Phillip, he thinks that whereas Carrie was artfully done, tragedy is incredibly repetitive and lumbering. Although he read it years ago, he still remembers the scenes where Carrie goes looking for work. He cared about her plight. Dreiser was non judgmental, Carrie did what she had to do. He also liked how Dreiser was concerned with money. He doesn't find that a primary concern of many writers today, may be because of those from affluent families be able to afford to get an MFA (Rather than something practical, like a degree in business or a counting).

Dreiser came to his career as a novelist slowly. The child of a German – Catholic immigrant father and a German – American mother, Dreiser was born in Terre Haute, Indiana, 1871. He grew up in a large family struggled with poverty and drifted apart, moving in and out of the booming city of Chicago. After dropping out of school, he slowly found his way to work as a reporter, taking jobs with newspaper in Chicago, St. Louis,

Toledo, Pittsburgh and finally New York, where he became interested in documenting the kind of urban poverty his own family had endure. Dreiser would later reflect that reading the philosophy of evolution oriented Herbert Spencer at a Pittsburgh public library in 1894 shattered the Catholic ideals with which he had been raised, creating his interested in writing literature that examined what, if not God, accounted for human action and social development. Though often inspired by true-life event, his work was not protruded but instead dramatization that considered fundamental questions about human behavior.

The failure of *Sister Carrie* upon the initial publication proved emotionally devastating for Dreiser. Despite the support of his wife, Share white, who had helped him to edit the novel, Dreiser sank into a depression his older brother Paul, who took the last name Dreiser during his raise to fame as a popular songwriter, gave Dreiser the money to stay at a sanatorium, where he recovered his health. For a while, he tried to learn his living by catering to more popular taste, taking on work as an editor and writer for popular publications. He and his spirited, and Dreiser took part in a number of scandalous affairs, including one that cost him a lucrative job as an editor at a published company.

This ended up being the push he needed to reinstate his work in fiction, and before his death in 1945 he would write seven more novels. The first of these, *Jennie Gerhard*, was published in 1911, eleven years after *Sister Carrie*. It drew from another sister's experiences, taking as its subjects a

young woman who has born the illegitimate child of a prominent man. Dreiser's later novel, including the well-known *An American Tragedy* (1925), continued to employ provocative story lines, and his work was often the target of obscenity charges. Sympathetic to the piling of the working class in which he was raised, Dreiser joined the communist Party shortly before his death. His work grew in stature, and he died a famous writer.

Caroline Meeber or Carrie is a woman. Because of her dissatisfaction, with life in her rural Wisconsin home, when she was on 18 year-old Caroline "*Sister Carrie*" Meeber takes the train to Chicago, where her older Sister Minnie, and her husband Steven Hanson, have agreed to take her in. On the train, Carrie meets Charles Drouet, a traveling salesman, who is attracted to her because of her simple beauty and unspoiled manner. They exchange contact information, but upon discovering the steady round of toil and somber atmosphere at her sister's flat, she writes to Drouet and discourages him from calling on her. There Carrie soon embarks on quest for work to pay rent to her sister and her husband, and takes a job nailing a machine in shoe factory.

By the time Drouet introduces Carrie to George Hurstwood. As the manager of Fitzgerald and May's he is a dashing man who has achieved success. He falls in love with Carrie and slowly sacrifices his family, home and job for her. He eventually steals ten thousand dollars from his employers and runs away with Carrie, ending up in New York with her. When his business in New York fails, he becomes an idler. Carrie

eventually leaves him and he turns into a homeless man who commits suicide at the end.

There are four reasons why the writer chooses this novel. First, the story of Dreiser's presents the melodramatic story, especially when Carrie realizes that sin may be her only option for survival.

Second, the novel describes the portrait of a man who lives in poverty. There are many problems that must be done in the process to survive. One of the ways in the process to survive is moving from the poor city (Columbia City) to the rich city in Chicago.

Third, novel is easy to understand for general people. When the writer reads this novel, there are not difficult to know the meaning from this novel, the story about it also can understand and this novel uses simple words into writing the story. So, the writer can be enjoying when she reads this novel.

Fourth, this novel also presents the social conflict that must be done. Related to that, the writer is interested to analyze this novel using sociological approach. That is why the writer intends to conduct a research of the novel with the title of research is "PORTRAIT OF CARRIE'S MISERY LIVING IN POVERTY IN THEODORE DREISER'S NOVEL *THE SISTER CARRIE* (1900): A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH".

## **B. Literature Review**

As far as the writer concerns, the research on the novel *The Sister Carrie* has been conducted by two students in Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta and Hebei University of China.

The first researcher is Lailatul Ardiati (2008) in *American Dream in Theodore Dreiser's Sister Caries*. This research paper elaborates the portraits of American Dream in Theodore Dreiser's novel, *Sister Carrie*, that are analyzed through sociological approach. The objectives of the research are to analyze the novel based on its structural elements and to analyze the novel based on the sociological approach, by identifying the relation between the novels the social background of the late nineteenth century American society. Having analyzed the novel, she comes to the conclusion as follows: the portraits of American Dream in *Sister Carrie* are mostly found in the characters drawn by Theodore Dreiser. Finally, the novel deals with the pursuit of success and happiness and there is correlation between the stories with the social reality in American society in the late nineteenth century.

The second researcher is Chengcheng Zhang and Hui Zhang (2009) in *From American Dreams to American Tragedies – Theodore Dreiser's Ponderation on American Society and Ruination of Morality*. This thesis elaborates the portraits society from American Dreams to American Tragedies – Theodor Dreiser's Ponderation on American Society and Ruination of Morality. The objectives of the thesis are to analyze the author exploration of the possibilities of 20<sup>th</sup> century American life with its

material profusion and spiritual doubt of the life values by comparing Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* and *An American Tragedy*. These two long novels gave Dreiser the prime form through which to explore in depth the possibilities of 20<sup>th</sup> century American life, with its material profusion and spiritual doubt of the live value. Having analyzed the novel, they come to the conclusion that Dreiser himself knew how brutal society could be and the truth that what reality was. And he gave plenty of evidence in these two works, where readers could see his compassion and empathy for shaving human beings and his ideas of ponderation on the relationship between American society and morality value standard and ended in the vacuity and even perdition of the soul, was controlled by the reality and environment but not one's will.

Different from two previous researches, this study focuses on the portrait of Carrie's misery living in poverty as one of the major characters in this novel by sociological approach. In this study the researcher gives the title "*Portrait of Carrie's Misery Living in Poverty in Theodore Dreiser's novel the Sister Carrie (1900): A Sociological Approach*."

### **C. Limitation of the Study**

In this research, the researcher will focus on the analysis of American society in the late 19th century as reflected in Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* 1900 and the researcher is going to analyze on the main characters from the Sociological approach by Laurensen and Swingewood's theories, as especially in the community principle.



#### **D. Problem Statement**

Based on the background of choosing the subject above, the main problem in this research is "How is the portrait of Carrie's misery living in poverty reflected in Theodore Dreiser's novel the *Sister Carrie* (1900)."

#### **E. Objective of the Study**

The objectives of the research are:

1. To analyze the structural element of the novel by finding character and characterization, setting, point of view, plot, style and theme.
2. To analyze the novel based on the sociological approach by identifying the relationship between the novel and the social background of time in the late nineteenth century of American Society.

#### **F. Benefit of the Study**

By researching Theodore Dreiser's novel the *Sister Carrie*, two benefits can be gained as follows:

1. Theoretical benefits

It gives contribution to the large body of knowledge particularly literary studies in Theodore Dreiser the *Sister Carrie*.

2. Practical benefit

To give deeper understanding in literary field as the reference to the other researcher and enriches the literary study, particularly among the students especially on Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta.

## **G. Research Method**

### **1. Types of Research**

This type of research is qualitative research in the form of literary work. Qualitative research does not need a statistic to explore the facts, so it does not include any calculation and enumeration.

### **2. Types of data and data source**

#### **a. Type of Data**

Type of data in this research is text that consists of words, phrases and sentences.

#### **b. Data Sources**

Type of data sources in this research are categorized into primary data source and secondary data source.

##### **1) Primary data source**

The primary data source of this research is the novel of *Sister Carrie* by Theodore Dreiser.

##### **2) Secondary data source**

The secondary data source includes some references and material. This is relevant to the study, whether by picking up from books and internet.

### **3. Research object**

The object of the research is the novel of Theodore Dreiser's the *Sister Carrie* consisting of 476 pages published in Doubleday in America and copyright in 1900.

4. Method of the data collection.

The method of collecting data in this research is library research.

The techniques are as follows.

- a. Reading the novel repeatedly.
- b. Taking note of the comporting part in both primary and secondary data.
- c. Classifying the data that sense categories.
- d. Developing the data provided.

5. Technique of the data analysis

In this thesis the technique that is used to analyze the data is descriptive analysis in which the writer identifies the relationship between the novel and the social background of the late of nineteenth century American society in the sociological approach.

## **H. Research Organization**

This research paper is divided into six chapters. Chapter I introduction, which contains the background of the study, literature reviews, problem statement, objectives of the study, limitation of the study, benefit of the study, research method and research paper organization. Chapter II presents underlying theory. It deals with the notion of sociology, the principles of sociology, and theoretical application. Chapter III delivers the

historical background with all aspect of social reality of American in the late of nineteenth century. Chapter IV covers the structural analysis of the novel. Chapter V discusses the sociological analysis of *Sister Carrie* (1900) novel. Chapter VI explains about the conclusion and suggestion of the research.